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ABSTRACT

This description of a free, two-day home appliance exposition organized by the county extension center of Johnson County, Kansas, outlines the basic structure of the exposition in a format that can serve as a guide for organizing similar expositions. Discussion of the exposition is divided into the following sections: rationale for an appliance expo: objectives: meeting place and dates set: publicity: exhibitors: speakers, program structure: teaching methods (mass media, exhibits, speaker presentations, and hands-on experience), and evaluation. A list of resources is appended. (MN)

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HOME APPLIANCE EXPO

submitted for:
National Consumer Education Award
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by
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Johnson County
Extension Home Economist

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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HOME APPLIANCE EXPO

A Consumer Education Event

The only cure for the headaches of shopping for home appliances would be to have all the choices and information about what's best for you all in one place. Impossible? Not as long as that free 2-day HOME APPLIANCE EXPO was in town.

Consumers have questions about new appliances! What are the advantages of the microwave/convection combination ovens over a microwave oven? What are the differences between one oven and another? One cooktop and another? What is the new induction range?

To provide answers to some of these consumer questions, the Johnson County Extension Center offered a HOME APPLIANCE EXPO on March 18 and 19 at the Johnson County Community College.

An array of appliances were included in the two-day event. The Extension Center's HOME APPLIANCE EXPO highlighted everything from microwave and convection ovens, combination ovens and dehydrators, to laundry equipment, dishwashers, and gas grills -- all major home appliances. Speakers and exhibitors from Johnson County appliance stores, manufacturers, Department of Energy, Gas Service Co., MACAP, and Kansas State University Extension Specialists emphasized energy use, buying tips, and the appliances of the 80's.

Why An Appliance Expo?

I had some very specific reasons why I thought our community would welcome such an event. Johnson County is an affluent suburb of Kansas City with a population of 260,000. The average age is 29½ years; average length of residence is two years. 84% are homeowners. These young homeowners are major consumers of appliances and they frequently ask for up-to-date information. The average educational level of Johnson County residents is 16% higher than in other portions of the state. Therefore, I felt that as consumers, they would have more questions about

products and desire more information about available resources. Shopping centers and appliance stores are available, but having such a variety does not make consumer choices easier. Consumers wonder when and which appliances to buy, and want to know ways to help them make these important decisions.

Based on this background, I reached several conclusions:

1. My job gives me the opportunity to help consumers become aware of the variety of home appliances, their use, and how to select appliances to fit particular family needs.

2. Competition would be great. As published by the *Kansas City Star*, a partial listing of courses available during the month of October accounted for 373 separate offerings by some 18 different organizations and agencies.

3. Johnson County consumers are busy. Many are two-income families who have little time for public meetings.

4. In the past, people have turned out in great numbers for Kansas City garden shows and home shows. Therefore, I felt that consumers might also attend a show that answered their questions about the many new appliances equipped with special features.

5. As a County Extension Home Economist, I receive many questions about the variety of new appliances entering the market.

With these thoughts in mind, I began formulating a plan to answer questions for consumers, and to make those answers publicly available to consumers who may not be aware of Extension Service resources. In addition, I wanted the home economics segment of the Extension Service to become more visible to Johnson County residents. I decided that an APPLIANCE EXPO, in which speakers representing business, education, government, and utilities, could demonstrate appliances in one populace and central location. An integral part of the planning involved an assessment of the current consumer informational needs, and the potential market for bringing together business, education, and consumer needs. Exhibitors could provide the practical "hands-on" aspect to give consumers the opportunity to ask

questions and express individual concerns. I planned sessions for both day and evening in order to reach my intended audience of employed men, women, high school and college students, home economics teachers, and general consumers. The two-day event was planned as an educational experience only -- no selling of appliances was to happen.

Objectives

We all know that consumer's lifestyles are changing because of energy conservation. We also know that energy conservation is a major concern. The primary objectives of the EXPO were to give consumers an opportunity to:

1. Evaluate the consumer's lifestyle, the economy, energy conservation and future trends as related to major appliance purchase.
2. Compare today's appliances for energy use.
   a. Become knowledgeable of manufacturers' strides toward designing for energy efficiency.
   b. Understand the impact of Department of Energy requirements.
3. Become aware of avenues available to get the best performance from appliances.
4. Know what to look for as they consider major appliances, and to be aware of trends of the 80's.

An additional purpose and opportunity provided by the EXPO, allowed volunteer leaders an opportunity to:

- Develop poise
- Develop self-confidence
- Achieve recognition for their efforts

Meeting Place And Dates Set

Johnson County Community College (JCCC) was selected because of its central location in the county, ample parking, theatre area ideal for presentations, and a large exhibit room. The college also provided an educational atmosphere, an aspect that I considered important. I proposed the idea to the Director of Community Services, JCCC, in May, 1980. JCCC was excited about the idea and wanted to co-sponsor. Dates were selected to be during the Community College's spring

break. During the year, the JCCC coordinator and I worked out details of room arrangements, meals, and other responsibilities.

PUBLICITY

- During my three-minute bi-monthly TV "Noon Edition" program, I promoted the EXPO. The program reaches 80,000 homes. Viewers learned not only what the EXPO offered but also "Microwave Oven Buying Tips", aired March 4 and 18.
- The Advertising Department and Editor of *Sun Publications* agreed to print a special section about the HOME APPLIANCE EXPO in their March "Home Living Section" -- a monthly magazine addition to the bi-weekly newspaper. This newspaper is delivered to every home in Johnson County. When I visited the newspaper editor, I went equipped with suggestions for articles, advertisers, and subject matter about the newest in appliances -- to whet their appetite. This helped sell the idea. It worked! When it came time to print the section, I provided pictures and wrote articles to inform readers about appliances as well as program details for those who could attend.
- The "Home Talk" radio program on KCNW gave me the opportunity to promote the EXPO. This 3-hour call-in talk show was March 14, four days prior to the EXPO. I talked about the program, differences in appliances, and ways that the Johnson County Extension Center comes to the aid of consumers.
- KCNW Radio Station asked me to do three-minute tapes for Public Service Announcements. This gave me the opportunity to give weekly talks about the EXPO.
- I contacted Channels 5, 9, and 41 TV News to explain the over-all purpose of the EXPO and to ask them to cover it on the 6:00 or 10:00 news. I provided them with written information.
- All area newspapers and radio stations received news releases and programs.
- I created and manned a booth at Oak Park Mall. This was a cooperative venture of county agencies -- Weatherization Bureau, utility companies, other energy-related companies -- to promote energy conservation. I featured the up-coming

EXPO, Energy Guide labels, and new lighting trends.

- The JCCC Spring '81 Bulletin carried the EXPO description. The Community Education Bulletin is mailed into every home in Johnson County, listing over 350 non-credit courses.
- The Home Economics and Microwave Newsletters carried complete details to 2100 Johnson County residents.
- The program was printed in the newsletter of the Greater Kansas City Home Economics Association, and was publicized through the head of Vocational Teachers located in Topeka.
- Flyers were distributed to retail stores, libraries, and the courthouse.

EXHIBITORS

In October, 1980, I wrote to Kansas City area manufacturers, explaining objectives, inviting them to participate or to give me the name of retail stores to contact. I had researched the companies before mailing letters in order to address letters to a particular person. I chose to work through the manufacturers initially to avoid showing favoritism toward retail stores. Attached to the letter was a form to indicate appliances, outlet needs and contact person. One month later I sent a second reminder letter thanking them for their support and also sent a second form "in case" form 1 was lost. To those who had not responded, I phoned them during the first three weeks of December to introduce myself and remind them of the letter they had received. To encourage them to participate, I cited the number of participants we expected to attend the EXPO. I asked if they planned to come or would like to recommend a retail dealer who might be interested.

Those personal contacts helped to relay my enthusiasm, seriousness, and purpose. As Ed Giesler of Volume Appliance asked, "I commend you for taking on such an undertaking, but I have to ask, why in the world are you doing this? What's in it for you?" I explained that I simply wanted to educate consumers. With such a complex array of decisions to make for any one major appliance, how can consumers know if

they are making the right choices? Consumers come to me and say, "We know we can get an honest, unbiased answer from the Extension home economist, so as I planned the EXPO I wanted to provide an unbiased program, an opportunity for answers to consumer questions.

I re-sent the first letter to the Johnson County retailers suggested by manufacturers and then personally visited each store. All but two appliance stores in Johnson County chose to participate and, in fact, were excited to be a part of the event. A final letter to exhibitors included flyers, program and maps.

Speakers

In thinking of my over-all objective, I planned unbiased speakers who would concentrate their talks on energy, buymanship and trends instead of what particular brands do. I contacted speakers I heard at the 1980 AHAM conference in Norfolk, Virginia. Two speakers from parent companies agreed to speak. I also selected speakers employed by appliance manufacturers that meet the best buying criteria. For example, a speaker from the Maytag Company was selected because their dishwasher with small holes on the sprayarm assures intense spray for superior cleaning. I also invited those whom I had heard previously or were recommended as unbiased, crowd-pleasing speakers. Where possible, I invited home economists from Kansas City-based manufacturers such as Kansas City Department of Energy and the local Gas Service Company. The chairman of MACAP, located at Kansas State University (KSU), Manhattan, Kansas and KSU Extension Specialists also were included on the program.

Program Structure

I designed the program bulletin and the structure of the two-day event. To encourage attendance at the educational presentations, "promptness prizes" donated by exhibitors, were awarded at the beginning of each presentation. In addition, I organized a committee of Extension Homemaker Unit members to help plan the program and portions of the event. Over-all, I wanted Johnson County consumers to see that

Extension, retailers, manufacturers, government and utility companies have continued to build a good working relationship and to provide a solid educational network.

TEACHING METHODS

In the case of an educated audience with limited time to pursue the information they need about current trends in appliances, teaching methods must be varied, timely, and stimulating.

Teaching methods employed use of mass media, newsletters, exhibits, speaker presentations and audience participation during sessions at the EXPO.

MASS MEDIA

RADIO PROGRAMS, TELEVISION AND NEWSPAPERS were used not only to publicize the EXPO but also to inform consumers about appliances. For example, both on TV and radio I told audiences what to look for when buying a microwave or convection oven. This same technique was employed in the newspaper stories I wrote. I feel that the mass media is an extremely important way to reach the audience I serve and that merely advertising the EXPO without giving consumers additional information to use in their daily lives may cause them to lose confidence in the Extension Service as an education source. Furthermore, by giving them a "taste" of what is going to happen at the EXPO, I felt they would be more interested and want to attend.

In addition to information about microwave and convection ovens, I wrote stories concerning induction cooktops, combination microwave/convection ovens, energy guide labels, what to do when your home freezer stops, and coping with refrigerator odors.

My regular *MONTHLY NEWSLETTERS* and quarterly *MICROWAVE NEWSLETTERS* reach 2,400 Johnson County residents. This educational device also publicized the EXPO and relayed current consumer information.

EXHIBIT AND SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS BY SPEAKERS AND EXHIBITORS covered a spectrum of topics that gave an over-view of the consumer's lifestyle in the present and future

economy, the need for energy conservation, and future trends of major appliance purchases. Participants also learned of government's and manufacturer's role in energy requirements, buying tips and trends, and the avenues available for best appliance performance. For example, some sessions detailed the methods consumers can use when they have complaints with manufacturers or appliance dealers.

Consumers learned how to select appliances to meet their individual life-styles; how to economize energy use and to get optimum use from appliances without sacrificing quality. Specifically, consumers at the EXPO learned how to deal with laundry problems due to lowered water temperatures. Because there were both exhibits and presentations, consumers learned by "seeing" and "hearing" about specific products.

To increase the visibility of the home economics program of the Extension Service and to provide an educational message, I designed an Extension Service booth. Here, for continuous viewing were slides visually telling the history of appliances, and "Save Energy-Save Money", an energy game, and a convenient opportunity to select Extension Service pamphlets on energy and appliances.

HANDS ON

Part of the learning happened because participants felt free to ask exhibitors and speakers about their individual concerns. During the session on energy guide labels, participants actually worked through a process to compare purchase price and energy efficiency between appliances.

Assembling a Home Appliance Manual, containing warranties and care manuals that accompany appliances, caught the interest of participants. Such a manual might come in handy some day when water from the dishwasher is all over the floor. By then, it is too late to wonder where that care manual is! During the session, consumers learned to set up an accessible filing system to fit individual needs and to organize it by appliance.

Finally, one hour of credit toward an advanced degree was received by home economics teachers, extension home economists, or anyone who wanted to enroll and attend the entire conference. I worked extensively with a professor at the College

of Home Economics, KSU, to set up the requirements to gain the credit. Extra credit also could be received by high school and local community college students through arrangements which I made with instructors.

Local volunteers who helped me plan the EXPO also learned as they worked. This committee of twelve helped plan the initial objectives, distributed flyers, provided leadership at the two-day event. As hostesses, the women handled registration, speaker introduction, awarded promptness prizes, directed exhibitors during set-up, and manned the Extension Booth. As they learned to speak before a group, they gained poise and self-assurance. Using a county committee, this not only gave my program support and backing, but also helped to teach these women to be managers. If, one day, they join the labor force, they can list their organizational duties and responsibilities on their resumés.

Evaluation

To rate the over-all value of the EXPO, evaluation forms were provided. Throughout the day, participants were reminded to complete the forms. As a novel incentive, 4-H'ers handed out 4-H suckers in return for a completed evaluation form. The result was a 70% return.

In addition to the general evaluation form, a future telephone survey to randomly selected participants will evaluate any attitude or behavioral changes as a result of attending the EXPO. This information can be a valuable tool in planning future Johnson County Extension programs.

Results of the general evaluation forms rated the over-all value of the EXPO as very good, while 90% of consumers rated individual presentations at 9 or 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. An interesting statistic from the evaluation forms revealed that for 70% of the participants this was their first experience with an educational program provided through the Extension Service.

Conclusions

The EXPO was a success. The fact that 12 exhibitors, 13 speakers and 525 consumers attended proves that the consumer's education and business can be successfully merged into a total educational experience. Channel 5, the most watched TV station in Kansas City, considered it newsworthy enough to give it coverage at the prime time of the 6:00 p.m. news. To quote from a consumer who viewed the TV coverage: "You gave a real promotion for Extension -- the best I've ever seen. You did a nice job! And they gave excellent coverage of the booths." Examples of other comments taken from evaluation forms proved its value:

"Every session was informative and provided timely and vital material for concerned consumers/homemakers. Great variety."

"I liked having the collections of appliances gathered together for comparison purposes."

"Nice to know about MACAP so the consumer doesn't have to fight manufacturers alone."

"What a great place for new ideas for teachers. Thank you."

The thirteen educational sessions plus exhibits fulfilled the original objectives of the EXPO to give consumers an opportunity to compare today's appliances, to understand energy requirements, energy conservation, and to be aware of future trends as related to major appliance purchases.

Consumers learned that it does matter about the size of holes in the sprayarm of the dishwasher! They learned that varying life styles do affect the choice of an oven -- microwave or convection or a combination. Participants learned how to get the most use from portable appliances presently owned -- how to bake a bundt cake in an electric skillet. Consumers learned to deal with the mistake of cleaning their continuous clean oven with a commercial cleaner.

The EXPO happening has resulted in a network of sources working together -- utility companies, government representatives, educational institutions, dealers, manufacturers, media -- all to the benefit of the consumer. The total experience of putting together a program of this magnitude was valuable. I, myself, learned

invaluable techniques for future programming and use of resources. The contacts with business will be of long-term value and they are now aware of Extension's resource for a referral of consumer problems.

Even if consumers were unable to attend the EXPO, through the various media, they were able to gain some general content of the EXPO by reading articles in the "Home Living Section" of the *Sun Publications*, by watching my two "Noon Edition" programs on TV, or by tuning in to "Home Talk", the 3-hour radio talk show on major home appliances. In addition, the media reached thousands of people telling them about Extension's services to be utilized.

As one person said to me: "This is the best publicized event ever held at the JCCC. I've heard it on KCMO, WDAF, Channel 5, and read about it in the *Sun*."

To quote an Extension home economist, "This was the best Extension training we've ever had". Calls and daily comments since the EXPO are: "Oh, I saw you on Channel 5...."; "By the way, I heard about your EXPO on radio WDAF..."; "I felt like I got a whole college equipment course in 2 days!"; "It was fantastic!". As these facts indicate, the EXPO proved to be one of the most stimulating devices for my particular community. While an EXPO may not be the best educational technique for all communities, my original assumption that it would prove beneficial in Johnson County has been demonstrated. I feel that consumers in my community will have the knowledge to make complex, yet effective, choices about appliances.

Resources and References

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Speakers and Exhibitors. See program for complete listing by name, title and affiliation.